

Speaker Hastert and the Majority have been blocking action on Congressman Stupak's Federal Response to Energy Emergencies Act (H.R. 3936) since last September, which would protect American consumers from high gas prices by empowering the FTC and the DOJ to investigate and prosecute oil companies engaged in price gouging at each stage of the energy production and distribution chain and outlaws market manipulation.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC, April 22, 2008.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House, U.S. Capitol,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SPEAKER PELOSI: Two years ago this week, you stated that House Democrats had a "commonsense plan" to "lower gas prices." In light of the skyrocketing gasoline prices affecting working families and every sector of our struggling economy, we are writing today to respectfully request that you reveal this "commonsense plan" so we can begin work on responsible solutions to help ease this strain.

Today, the national average for regular unleaded now stands at \$3.51 per gallon, according to AAA, which is \$1.18 higher than it was at the start of the 110th Congress—a more than 50 percent increase. In fact, gas prices rose more in the last 15 months than they did in the six years prior to Democrats taking control of both Houses of Congress in January 2007.

In the midst of a slowing economy, falling home values and soaring costs of living, this is a heavy premium for working families to bear.

Americans, particularly those in suburban and rural communities, are paying more simply to commute to work each day. America's truckers, faced with the prospect of paying \$1,200 to fill up a tank that just a few years ago cost \$600, must now consider taking less work or going out of business altogether. We have seen reports of school districts where filling up buses is already costing as much as \$70,000 more than originally budgeted.

Once a nightmare scenario, \$4 gasoline is now a very real possibility of becoming a summer staple. In some cities, including San Francisco and Chicago, it is already a startling reality.

We noted with great interest, then, that on several occasions you have announced the existence of a Democratic plan to lower gas prices. In fact, it was two years ago this week, on April 24, 2006, when you pledged that "Democrats have a commonsense plan to help bring down skyrocketing gas prices." Just two weeks after that, you stated that Democrats had "real solutions" that would "lower the price at the pump."

Yet 15 months into the 110th Congress, you have yet to reveal this "commonsense plan."

House Republicans stand ready to work with you and our Democratic colleagues in a bipartisan fashion to address America's energy crisis. As part of that effort, we respectfully request that you reveal the "commonsense plan" to lower gas prices you promised two years ago. The ability to fully consider its provisions, details and costs—including any proposed new taxes on gasoline or energy as we have seen in the past—is critical if we are to effectively serve our constituents facing ever-increasing prices at the pump.

We appreciate your timely reply to this request.

Sincerely,

John Boehner, Republican Leader; Roy Blunt, Republican Whip; Adam Putnam, Conference Chairman; Thaddeus McCotter, Policy Committee Chairman; Kay Granger, Conference Vice-

Chair; John Carter, Conference Secretary; Tom Cole, Chairman, National Republican Congressional Committee; Eric Cantor, Chief Deputy Whip; David Dreier, Rules Committee Ranking Republican.

Mr. Speaker, I will be asking my colleagues to defeat the previous question at the appropriate time so we can consider ideas for lowering prices at the pump.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY), chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for the time.

Let me simply say this bill is intended to increase the small business set-aside for these research programs. That does no harm for a large agency whose budget has been rising, such as the Department of Defense, but it can do immeasurable harm to the crown jewel of our research agencies in this country, the National Institutes of Health.

If we were to do what this bill does to NIH, it would result in \$187 million less being available for traditional medical research grants at medical research centers and universities. I think that that is not a good idea. The President's budget has already reduced the number of grants that NIH will be able to provide by almost 500 grants. This will add about another 500 grant reduction to the President's budget. That would mean that we would be supporting a grant level for the traditional NIH grants at about 1,100 grants fewer than was the case in 2007. I think that is a very bad idea. Therefore, when the bill comes before us, I would urge support of the Ehlers amendment, which will correct the problem with respect to the National Institutes of Health.

I know that some people will say, "Well, we're not reducing the number of grants, we're simply shifting the nature of grants from traditional grants to small business grants." But the fact is that the success rate for small business grants under this bill is expected to rise to 52 percent whereas the success rate for applications for traditional NIH grants is expected to decline to 18 percent. That is a disparity that the scientific community and the country at large simply cannot afford.

NIH believes that there will not be sufficient high-quality grants under the small business set-aside to pass peer review over time, and that means they would simply have to lapse back precious research money that could be used for heart disease, for Parkinson's, for cancer, things like that.

So I would strongly urge, when this bill comes before us, to vote for the Ehlers amendment as a way to address that balance.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to the distinguished ranking member of the Rules Committee, Mr. DREIER of California.

(Mr. DREIER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DREIER. I thank my friend for yielding.

"A commonsense plan to bring down skyrocketing gasoline prices." That's what my friend from Pasco just quoted my California colleague, our distinguished Speaker, as having said 2 years ago tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at what has taken place over that 2-year period of time, we know, and I will tell you that as a driver and a representative of people who drive the freeways of southern California, we've seen gas prices skyrocket over the past 2 years.

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There's no plan put forward.

We're very proud of the fact that we have a plan. I just had the privilege of talking to my friend from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS) about some of the challenges that we face. Obviously, I believe that environmentally sound exploration in ANWR, the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve, is the responsible thing for us to do. The Outer Continental Shelf is what we need to pursue. There's this potential of a great new shale find in North Dakota.

And then one of the interesting things that Mr. SHIMKUS and I were just discussing is the fact that it, of course, has been three decades, three decades, since we have seen the construction of any new refinery in this country and, of course, three decades since we have seen the construction of any nuclear power facility. We all know that nuclear power is the cleanest, safest, most cost-effective energy source around.

These are the kinds of responsible things that we are proposing, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, our colleagues on the other side of the aisle have consistently stood in the way of every single one of those very responsible measures.

And pursuing alternative sources is something else that we strongly support. Coal to liquid, those are the kinds of things that we need to be doing.

Now, what is it that we are doing here with this rule? We are, of course, talking about small business issues, but we know the overwhelming concern of our constituents today is this problem of skyrocketing gasoline prices.

So when we move to defeat the previous question, Mr. HASTINGS, my friend from Pasco, is going to seek to offer an amendment to this rule. The amendment will simply say that any Member, any Member, who has a proposal that will deal with providing a commonsense plan to address the problem of skyrocketing gas prices will be able to offer that amendment here on the House floor. So all we're asking our colleagues to do is to amend this rule by defeating the previous question so that we will be able to deal with one of the most pressing concerns that our constituents are asking us to address.